

English letters by concentrating the English
genius on
writing, it has disfigured only too many of its
works with

a mania for improving the reader,

The English novelists, above all, would
have produced
much more vital offspring had their
conceptions been

less immaculate. Malory already flounders in
an unhappy

muddle between ethical disapproval and
aesthetic admiration

for a love like Guinevere's. With Defoe
the thin veil

of edification, however violently brandished
about, is too

transparent to obscure his vigorous outlines;
but, by the

time it has fallen on Richardson, this mantle
has become

that stuffy woollen blanket whose folds the
eighteenth-

century good sense of Fielding indignantly
set out to tear

aside; as for the English novel of the
nineteenth century,

who shall number tie thickness of petticoats
under which

a few of its strongest specimens have
contrived somehow

or other to live and move, even down to our
own day?

But at what a cost! To pass from Dickens to
Balzac, from

Thackeray to Flaubert, from Meredith to
Stendhal, is

like leaving school and schoolmasters for the
company of

intelligent and untrammelled adults. And I
own I find it

very hard to go back again. These robust
moralists whose

stifled emotions burst out, instead, into
grotesque extravagances

of humour or sentiment, seem so
provincial and

parochial: caricaturists, not painters, of life.
The difference

between them and the French is the

difference between the
Bible narrative of Judah and Israel, interested
not in understanding the true character of their Kings,
but only in whether they did good or evil in the sight of
the Lord,
and the passionate dispassionateness of a
Thucydides. The
first may contain great imagination at
moments, and
flashes of great poetry; but it is singularly
inadequate as a
presentation of life, The writer's axe is
grouad; but the
reader's teeth are set on edge. Or consider
the contrast